A

GENERAL EPISTLE

TO THE

Flock of God,

But more particularly, in

CUMBERLAND,

In the Openings of Love, and Freſh ſpring of Life, am I drawn forth, to viſit you with this Epiſtle.

Dear Friends, and Brethren,

LOok to the Rock from whence ye were hewen, and to the hole of the Pit from whence ye were digged, (that is to ſay) never forget from whence you came, no more than to what length and degree you are attained, what you were when the Lord firſt viſited you; and what you ſtill are of your ſelves, without the help, aſſiſtance and abillity of his Power; hold this faſt in your Remembrance, and it will greatly tend to humble you, and keep you little and low in your own Eyes, in a true Self-Denial: So ſhall the Lord alone be exalted, and his Glorious Power extolled over all.

It was the Lord that viſited with the day-ſpring of his Love from on high, by the ſhining forth of his Glorious Light, out of Darkneſs (where your Region was) in a Land of Darkneſs, a Country where there was a Famine, not of Bread nor Water, but of the preaching of the Goſpel; and brought us to a Land and Country,

where *Light* and *Life* is, and that flows with *Milk* and *Honey*. Forget not the way of your Souls Travel; and you that have not known it yet, muſt tread the ſame Path, before you can come to be ſharers with thoſe that have ſo done, who have known what it was when they entered their Journey, or beginning of the Work (to Drink a bitter Cup) and alſo of a ſweet One (and do) extolled be the Right Arm of the Lord, the great and mighty Power of God (the bitter Cup was Judgment) ſet up to bring Down, Judge out, and Burn up all that which was contrary; and as a Sword to ſlay the Enmity, and of twain to make one new Man.

Then was the Weeping, then was the Mourning, then was the Quaking and Trembling; then was the time of Travel with our hands upon our Loyns; then did the Earth Tremble at the preſence of the Lord (the way of Sion's Redemption being through Judgment) love it ſtill, and dwell in a ſenſe of it to the End, and the Enemy ſhall never prevail againſt you; dwelling in him to whom all Judgment is committed both in Heaven and in Earth (in Chriſt) and ſo in the Light, in the Life, in the quickening Spirit.

Has this been the way of your Soul's Travel, from the beginning (that have known the True and Right beginning) in and through many Afflictions, various Tryals, and deep Temptations, Straits, Hardſhips and great Beſetments, both within and without.

Dear Friends, in a ſenſe of the tendering Life and Love of God, let me aske, who delivered, who ſaved, who hath kept and preſerved until now, (in and through this Refining Furnace) ſurely you can ſay with my Soul, the Lord alone by his own Hand and Arm of Power, and mighty Strength; by which he hath never failed, nor never will fail thoſe that truſt thereto, and relie thereupon; Therefore Dear and Tender Children of the Light and of the Day, truſt therein, and keep thereto unto the End, and then you ſhall be Eternally happy.

For *Dear Friends*, although on this wiſe you have known the Travel of your Souls, in paſſing from Death to Life, and out of Darkneſs into the Light, which is the Path that the Younger Generations, that is coming up muſt Tread and Travel in; you can tell

tell them by learned Experience, for their Encouragement, the Lord by his Power will never leave them, nor forſake them, if they follow him in the way of his Judgments (which he mixeth with Mercy) that muſt be owned and loved, to bring down Self, and the Man's part, and whatever would exalt it ſelf above the pure; you can tell them, that when your hands did hang down, and your knees ſmote one another; ſo that ſometimes your Hearts were fearful, whether they ſhould be lifted up, or ſtrengthened again, yet having Faith, and being taught by the Grace of God, to have Patience alſo to wait the Lord's time; he by his Power appeared, to lift up the hands, and ſtrengthen the knees, and make the fearful Heart ſtrong by the Might of his Power.

Yea, the Lord having ſo often wrought your Deliverance, and done wonderful Things for you, beyond expectation, or what you then could ſee, ſo that you have been ready to ſay, Oh! I hope I ſhall never meet with ſuch Exerciſes, Tryals and Temptations, as heretofore I have met with, and eſpecially if any thing of ſelf was ſet up, to glory above what was meet, becauſe of what the Lord had done for you, hath not the only Wiſe God ſeen it good, after all this, to try and prove you again? Both without and within, that you might be kept truly humble and low before him, always depending upon his Power, and nothing of your own, yea to try your Faith and Patience, and for a time hath hid his Face from you; and that you have had but little (if any) either Bread or Water, in ſo much, becauſe of your weakneſs and faintneſs, the Enemy hath been very buſie to Tempt you to deſpair of the ſufficiency, of the Power, Love and Mercy of the Lord, or to turn you aſide from the way of Truth, uſeing all his ſubtilty, to keep out of your Remembrance, and from calling to mind how, and in what way and manner, the Lord heretofore brought you over great Mountains, and high Hills, and levelled them all.

And through great Depths, and ſore Pangs of Soul; yea, your Hopes ſometimes have been ſo little, that ſome of you have been ready to ſay, with one in the Days of Old, *Lord haſt thou forgotten to be Gracious.*

And yet has not the Lord, after all this and much more, renewed your Hope and Strength again, and by the Glorious Appearance of the Pure Light of his heavenly Son, hath again and again, time after time broken forth, and Gloriouſly ſhined in your Hearts and inward Parts, to the manifeſting and clearly diſcovering unto you the Enemies Wiles and Working, with all the Miſts, Foggs and Darkneſs he brings in with him, to the expelling and driving away the ſame, through the ſtrength and ability of the Power that is received in the Light, even the Light of Life; that thereby you might ſee and find out, what hath been the cauſe of your being ſo exerciſed, ſo long after your Convincement; and not only ſo, but after you have known many Deliverances, and have travelled through much, and have known watering Showers, and fruitful Seaſons, for that end, when found out, and diſcovered to be brought to the Judgment and Sentence of Condemnation; that all that is of that old curſed Self, in which the Enemy works to the hurt of the Soul, may be ſlain with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and conſumed with the Fire of the Lord.

Thus hath the only *Wiſe God* taught you by his *Light*, *Grace* and holy *Spirit*, and thereby you have learned experience, and ſpiritual skill, with a true willingneſs wrought in you, how to come to his Judgment Seat, that you might come to his Mercy Seat alſo; that ſo you might know the way of your Soul's Travel, from Death to Life, (through Weeping and Mourning, to Joy and Gladneſs) through poverty and weakneſs, to feed at the Table of the Lord, and ſo come to have your ſtrength daily renewed, to ſit in heavenly places in Chriſt Jeſus, in that Reſt prepared of God in Him, where his Glory Shines in your indwellings, that will make you to Shine as the Stars of Heaven; as you keep your Station in the inward watchfulneſs, and waiting in the true Light, (in the true ſilence) and inward ſtillneſs.

Where the mind as it gets thither, and is ſtayed there, is unmoveable, for its ſtay and ſtrength is the ſure Rock and Foundation of God, his great and glorious Power (out of which, both the Water and Honey doth proceed) this is the ſweet Cup) oh! the meltings of it, oh! the divine ſweetneſs that is in it, who can ſet forth the Greatneſs, the Goodneſs and Excellency thereof? As

As you know *Dear Brethren*, and *Tender Sisters*, how that our Souls many times when together, have been made rich partakers, and livingly to poſſeſs and enjoy the ſame, in the living enjoyment, of the life-giving Preſence of our God (and one another Near and Dear) when our Bottles have been ſo filled with the ſweet Wine of his Kingdom (as my Soul at this moment of time is) that we have not been able to contain, but Tears of Joy have often run, that have far exceeded the Tears of our Sorrow, Oh! how do I love and like the running of them, and how doth my Soul delight therein; even in the freſh ſpringing up of Life, as I know a Remnant of you ſo do.

Dear Friends, whom my Soul loveth in all true Tenderneſs, and unto whom I am unſeperably joyned, in the Unity of the Spirit of Life and Love (though at this diſtance, my Heart unto you-ward is full, yet ſtreameth forth, as a ſtream of Love and Life, that flows from the living Fountain, with rowling of Bowels for all your Eternal Good, both Old and Young, anciently, and of late convinced (that you Ancient ones, whoſe time cannot be long here) may finiſh in that in which you have begun, in the freſhneſs, in the livingneſs and true tenderneſs, to the receiving of the Crown, that ſo it may be well with you for evermore.

And that all you that are younger in the Truth (and Years of Age) pleaſe not your ſelves with long Life (but Good and Godly) nor yet with Worldly Preferment; but wait with all Diligence and true Fear, to feel the work of the Converting, Changing, Melting, Moulding, Heart Tendering Power, of the Great and Mighty God, to work a true Change in you, throughout, both in Body, Soul and Spirit, that ſo it may be well with you, when Death looks you in the Face.

And Oh my Dear and Ancient Friends, Be Careful that you never forget, nor depart from your firſt Love, and true Tenderneſs; and all you Younger that have not ſo fully known it, wait dilligently for it, that you may know the bleſſed effects of it, as the Ancients have done, that through the Fear of God, placed in the Heart (and that becauſe of his Chaſtiſements) and Awe and Dread of the Lord, that was upon them in that day: You may come to

ſay,

ſay with them; Oh! that I may never ſpeak a word that may offend him, nor do any evil Action that may greive his Good Spirit, nor break my Peace with him, Oh! that I may neither Eat nor Drink to Exceſs, nor wear any thing in Apparel contrary to the pure Truth, neither be found in any Carriage or Behaviour, in Converſation nor Communication, in the whole Courſe of my Life, amongſt the Sons and Daughters of Men, that may give any occaſion, or whereby Truth may ſuffer; this was and is the deſire, and cry of all the Faithful, and thoſe that truly fear the Lord, and have known what the firſt Love is, and the bleſſed effects of it.

Oh! this was a growing time, when nothing was valued like unto the Truth; and it is ſo ſtill, with all that love Truth and Righteouſneſs.—— No Hardſhip, no Scoffing, no Scorn, no Reproach for the Name of Jeſus, no Suffering nor Spoilling of Goods, nor Impriſonment of Body, Principalities nor Powers, things preſent nor to come, ſhall be able to ſeperate ſuch from the Love of God, which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.

All this, and much more than I am able to expreſs, was the effects of your firſt Love and true Tenderneſs (that have known it) that was begotten in you thereby; keep to it, live in it, and never depart from it, nor forget it; that ſo you may continue unto the End, and in the End, in that in which you have begun; as thoſe which the Lord in his Love, and by his Power, hath thus far preſerved, ſo ſhall you be Everlaſtingly happy, when time here ſhall be no more.

And ſo *Dear Friends*, in that I am thus far clear of what lay upon my Spirit to put you in Mind *(where we were)* when the Lord firſt viſited us in the Morning of his Day, and what the Lord hath done for us, with the younger Generations that are coming up, and what we ſtill are, without the help and aſſiſtance of the Lord's Power.

I have yet ſomething to ſignifie unto you *(what we were)* when we were firſt viſited, with a few words of Counſel and Encouragement to *Friends*, in and under ſuffering, that all may have their Eye, to, where true Safety, Preſervation, Growth and Proſperity is, in all that which is good.

Dear

Dear Friends, were we the Wiſeſt, the Greateſt, the Mightieſt, or Richeſt amongſt the Sons and Daughters of Men? *(what were we)* but ſuch moſt of us, as in the Prophets, Chriſt and the Apoſtles time, that were accounted Fooliſh, Weak, Mean, Baſe and Contemptible, like the *Jews* in the days of the Prophet *Nehemiah*, that were called feeble by the Enemies of God, and of his People (*Sanballat*, *Tobiah* and *Geſham*, who mocked and laughed them to Scorn) and ſaid, what do theſe feeble *Jewes*, not knowing what work the the Lord had determined to do by them; in anſwer unto the prayer of the Prophet put up unto the Lord.

Who accordingly hath done great and wonderful things in this his Day, through the ſtrength and might of his own Power; by thoſe he hath called and choſen out of the World, tho' counted Weak and Feeble, yet made able and ſtrong, through his renewing of their ſtrength, and here is encouragement given by our Lord and Maſter Jeſus Chriſt, even for all true Believers, and faithful Followers of him, through many Tribulations: *Behold*, ſaith Chriſt, *I give unto you Power to tread on Serpents, and Scorpions, and over all the Power of the Enemy, and nothing by any means ſhall hurt you, Notwithſtanding, in this rejoyce not, that the Spirits are ſubject unto you; but rather rejoyce that your Names are written in Heaven. In that hour Jeſus Rejoyced in Spirit*, and ſaid, *I thank thee O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hadſt hid theſe things from the Wiſe and Prudent, and haſt revealed them unto Babes (even ſo Father) for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight.*

What remains for you then to ſay, oh ſaith the truly humbled, what manner of Love is this where withall the Lord my God hath loved me, and viſited my Soul? And more eſpecially, in a day and time, when I was an Enemy in my Mind to him by wicked works (oh ſaith ſuch) I am conſtrained to love him again, and to fear him always, that I may in no wiſe offend him, ſo Good and Gracious a God, ſo Dear and Tender a Father, Lord and Maſter, who hath dealt ſo kindly and favourably with me, not according to my deſert, for ſaith ſome, I was unworthy that his Love ſhould reach me.

What, were we ſuch? And yet notwithſtanding all this, and much more, hath the Lord, with whom there is no reſpect of Perſons,

ſons, loved us freely, in a time acceptable never to be forgotten (tho' you were ſuch) oh! be humbled, bowed and laid low before him, under the conſideration and ſenſe of his love, that our Hearts may be often broken, and truly tendered thereby; for if the love of God do not work that effect therein, (nothing can) but all that carefully, in true fear, dwell in a ſenſe thereof, becauſe of what thereby the Lord has done for them; the ſecret cry of their Soul is, oh! I can never do enough for the Lord, to anſwer his love, and the Knowledge of his bleſſed Truth he hath given me (and not only ſo) but becauſe of the Divine Sweetneſs and abounding thereof, that I have many times felt to ſpring a-freſh in my Heart and Soul, in waiting upon him.

Wherefore ſuch is made often to ſay, there is nothing that I have and do enjoy, that is ſo near and dear to me, but I can freely part with, and forgoe, for the Lord and his worthy names ſake, being all I have and do Enjoy (it is the Lord's) ſo can his redeemed ſay with a good underſtanding, not only their Souls and Bodies, but all they have and do enjoy is his.

So *Dear and Suffering Friends*, bleſſed and happy are all, whoſe Godly Reſolution this is, that is thus redeemed by his Power (hold faſt and continue your Godly Reſolution) unto the end, in the true Faith, and look not out, nor give way to the reaſoning part, for that may hurt you in your Suffering Teſtimony; but look in, and keep near the Lord (in his pure *Light*) and relie upon the ſufficiency of his Power; that by waiting and watching therein, you may receive ſtrength; then you will be Strong and Couragious, Bold and Valliant for the Truth upon Earth; for he, for whoſe Names ſake you ſuffer, has ſufficient in ſtore to reward all your Loſſes, Croſſes, Tryals and Sufferings, both here and eternally hereafter; and aſſuredly will not withhold it from you, as you ſtand faithful unto him in your Suffering Teſtimony unto the end; unto which the Lord by his own Power, and Arm of Mighty Strength, preſerve you all, *Amen*.

Dear Friends, I being well ſtricken in Years, cannot promiſe long time to my ſelf in this World (neither ought the Youth) I was willing, in anſwer to the Motion of God's bleſſed Spirit, moving upon me, to ſend this Epiſtle abroad amongſt you, as a manifeſt token of my entire love, and tender care over the Flock of Chriſt; wiſhing that Grace, Mercy and Peace, in and through him, may be multiplied and increaſed amongſt you, and that Brotherly Love and Unity, in the one Spirit of Life may continue, and abound more and more; and that in all your Meetings and Families, you may be bleſſed with heavenly bleſſings in Chriſt Jeſus.

Given forth at *Meare* in *Somerſetſhire*, the 23d. Day of the 5th. Month, 1698.

20 AP 57

From your Friend and Brother in the Covenant of Light and Life,

John Banks.